

HARVARD DRAMA REVIEW

Volume III, Number 1,
October 30, 1965

EDITOR: Joel Silverstein
BUS. MANAGER: Jon Arnason
ART EDITOR: Richard Rogers
ADVT. MANAGER: Samuel White
ADVISOR: Robert Kiely

STAFF

Dan Adams
Peter Ames
Sue Aronson
Suzanne Bloom
Chris Campbell
Barry Custer
Charles Kelly
Maeve Kinkead
Sherry Leeright
Drew Stroud

EDITORIAL BOARD

David Ansen
Anthony Hixon
John Williams
Gabriel Motzkin

CONTENTS

DUEL OF ANGELS Paul Schmidt

THE MISER David Ansen

JEAN-LUC GODARD: A RECENT SURVEY Tim Hunter

An Original Play:

THE ICE-FIELD OF THE ABSOLUTE ENCOUNTER David S. Cole

Biographical notes

Paul Schmidt -- Paul Schmidt, a doctoral candidate in Slavic, was a resident member of the Charles Playhouse last year, and acted in the feature film The Playground, directed by Richard Hilliard, soon to be released in Boston. In addition to much acting in Harvard theater as an undergraduate, Mr. Schmidt studied under Marcel Marceau and worked with Jacques Charon of the Comedie Francaise while on a leave from Harvard in France.

David Ansen -- David Ansen, a junior in English and an editor of the Harvard Drama Review, has written two plays as an undergraduate. There's Been a Lot of It Around Lately, a one-acter, has been produced at the Loeb Experimental Theater, and The 24-hour Flu, a full length play, shared first place awards in the Adams House playwrighting competition last year.

Tim Hunter -- Tim Hunter, with his partner Jonathan Hale, is the President of Harvard's two film societies: Ivy Films, and the Film Study Group at the Carpenter Center. He divides his spare time between drawing malevolent squirrels (for fun and profit), attempting to shoot a film called Sinister Madonna, and seeing Hitchcock's Vertigo, which, at the lat counq, he has seen fourteen times.

David Cole -- David Cole, a second year graduate student in English, spent 1963-4 in Europe on a Shaw travelling fellowship studying repertory theater. Five of his plays were produced at Harvard while he was an undergraduate, in addition to his directing The Braggart Warrior on the Loeb mainstage. His play, Bolts and Bars to Go (published in the Fall, 1962 issue of Mosaic) is soon to be produced at the Circle-in-the-Square Theater in New York, as part of their new-playwrights' workshop.

THE ICE-FIELD OF THE
ABSOLUTE ENCOUNTER

by David S. Cole
Copyright © 1965

At the Loeb Experimental Theater tonight.

To Debby,
whose grace and kindness
make so much else possible.

(Scene: A mountain clearing with an ice floor, surrounded by grass and bushes. The backdrop, representing a range of sheer, precipitous ice-mountains, should give the impression of a distance infinitely spacious and infinitely occupied. At a few points on the backdrop, clumps of trees with bright green leaves are represented as growing out of the ice.)

ISAAC enters, stooped under the weight of a pack and two huge bags of fagots. His face shows the strain. After he has taken no more than a couple of steps onto the stage, he looks about him in wonder, throws down the sacks, and turning from the audience, explores the panorama of the ice-mountains. While he is doing so, ABRAHAM enters, stops, looks at ISAAC, shakes his head in pity, and then sits down on one of the sacks. ISAAC whirls round to ABRAHAM.)

ISAAC: I like it here!
ABRAHAM: Do you? You like the ice-mountains?
ISAAC: That's really what they are -- ice-mountains! Not twenty miles from where we have sheep, there are ice-mountains! I can't get over it!
ABRAHAM: There may have been a time I could get this worked up over the scenery.
ISAAC: I kick at the dirt with my sandal and it's like steel. This ice is like steel! And yet-- feel that sun! How can the ice not melt?
ABRAHAM: I admit, it's puzzling.
ISAAC: It's not puzzling, it's fantastic! The sun is melting the cheese in my wallet, I can feel it running down my leg; but this ice --
(kicks at the ice with his heel)
look, you can't make a dent, even.
ABRAHAM: It's puzzling to me, Isaac, as it is to you. Beyond that, I don't know what to say.
ISAAC: Is it always like this?
ABRAHAM: I don't live here, Isaac. I'm not a citizen of the ice-mountains.
ISAAC: Oh, you've been here before. You say to mother you're going into the mountains and we don't see you for the next month. You come here.
ABRAHAM: I do, I don't deny anything.
ISAAC: Well, I'm asking you, father, is it always like this: the sun striking upon the ice, the ice

like steel.
ABRAHAM: To be honest with you, Isaac, I never noticed before this time.
ISAAC: How could you not notice?
ABRAHAM:
(rising impatiently)
How could I not...I didn't! I've had other things to notice, to keep my eye on. I've had my affairs...
ISAAC: I can't get over it and you never noticed it!
(pause)
I'm trying to find out why we're here.
ABRAHAM:
(indicating the sacks)
Would you begin getting out the sticks, please.
ISAAC: And that's another thing. What is it with all these sticks?
ABRAHAM: There have to be sticks...
ISAAC: Two bags of the damned things I've dragged up this mountain and across the ice.
ABRAHAM: I have to have kindling.
ISAAC: That doesn't answer anything.
ABRAHAM: I'll say it again: for what I'm going to do I need kindling.
ISAAC: Well, that's all I'm asking you, father: what are you going to do?
ABRAHAM: But then, I'll need flint, too, and I never thought of that till this moment. Would you look in your pack, please, and see if you happen to have a flint on you.
ISAAC: Now I'm supposed to have flints!
ABRAHAM: Isaac, I'm not saying you're supposed to have flints. Do you hear anybody suggesting anything like that?
ISAAC: Oh, what's all this now -- ?
ABRAHAM: All right, Isaac: why are we here? We're here to make sacrifices. We're upon this ice-field to give over something of ourselves to the living God. And I mean the both of us, Isaac, is that clear?
ISAAC: So then, the sticks and the flint --
ABRAHAM: Don't be hasty there, Isaac! There's more than one way of sacrifice, and a number of things to offer. Now will you pile up the sticks, please.
ISAAC:
(shrugs)
I don't see what harm that could do.
(turns to the sacks)
ABRAHAM:
(his voice full of anguish)
Isaac!
ISAAC: Yes?
ABRAHAM:
(mastering himself)
Will you pile up the sticks, please.
ISAAC: I've already said yes, I will.
(ISAAC takes large handfuls of sticks from one of the sacks, sits with his legs crossed on the ground, and begins to pile up the sticks into tangled bunches. As soon as he gets a few handfuls into a pile, the pile collapses.)
ABRAHAM: As you say, I've been here before. I've come at various times in my life with various animals in tow. And sometimes, no animal at all...
(pause)
Do I make myself at all clear, my son?
(an expectant -- for ABRAHAM - - pause; ISAAC is completely absorbed in his work.)
ISAAC: I don't know what you think you're going

to do with all these sticks and no flint.

ABRAHAM: Sometimes, no animal. Sometimes I would bring God the state of my mind and that would be all I'd bring Him. Here is the place where my Lord and I grow explicit with each other.

(pause)

Do you sense me trying to tell you something, does any of that get through?

(long, and again, for ABRAHAM, expectant pause. ABRAHAM makes as if to speak again, and just at that moment ISAAC happens to speak, inadvertently interrupting him.)

ISAAC: I go on bunching these sticks and piling them up -- pointless, thankless work, unless the Lord should do what he once did for you. Wasn't it in Chaldea that he reached down flame to kindle your sacrifice?

(pause)

ABRAHAM: I'm sorry, what did you say?

ISAAC: I'm asking you, wasn't it in Chaldea --

ABRAHAM: Oh, about Chaldea, where the lightning took a hand -- yes; but that was in Chaldea, I don't get that kind of service anymore.

ISAAC: You're going to need something like it.

ABRAHAM: You know, Isaac, you really do have no idea of what I'm going to need.

ISAAC: Well, are you going to enlighten me at some point?

ABRAHAM: Enlighten you! -- are you serious? It must be for the light you've come to, for very light, that you can't see what a place you're at.

ISAAC: Look, I can't be expected --

ABRAHAM: You're expected to use the eyes in your head, that's all. "Enlighten me"!

(gesturing at the backdrop)

Trees have their being from ice, and it's not enough for you!

(ISAAC makes as if to speak; ABRAHAM comes in on top of him.)

What's enough then, Isaac?

(pause)

Well, I can't be going on like this...

ISAAC:

(with exaggerated politeness making sure that ABRAHAM is finished speaking.)

I can't be expected to puzzle out the trees as they go with the sunshine, as they go with the ice. What is it with all this sunshine and ice? What kind of journeying have I been about that I end in such a place?

ABRAHAM: Everything's here!

ISAAC: Now that -- that can't be!

ABRAHAM: It is! It is! This reach of ice, this moment of time -- do you really not sense it: the way purposes on every side are crying out to be known purposes, the way you just say what you want and it's here for you.

ISAAC: I can tell you one thing we want and don't have.

ABRAHAM: I defy you to say it.

ISAAC: To say one thing we want and don't have? Now I think of it, I can say two.

ABRAHAM: Yes, well?

ISAAC: Well, one thing is flint --

ABRAHAM: Are you still on the flint?

ISAAC: Isn't it just like you to be minimizing that!

ABRAHAM: I'll get my flame alight, don't you worry about me!

ISAAC: Catch me worrying! Want to hear the other thing?

ABRAHAM: One was flint...

ISAAC: Yes, one was flint; and the other --

ABRAHAM: Wait -- stop it!

ISAAC: Why "stop it"?

ABRAHAM: Because it's taken me a while, but I now know what you're going to say.

ISAAC: Is that a reason not to say it?

ABRAHAM: Isaac, you have to stop!

ISAAC: Now? Not for anything in the world!

ABRAHAM: You have to!

(ABRAHAM throws himself at ISAAC, trying to get his hand over ISAAC's mouth. ISAAC intercepts his arm and pins it behind his back.)

ISAAC: Don't be a crazy man and then look to me to be kind; I don't love you well enough.

(ISAAC releases ABRAHAM, who falls to the ground.)

So -- is that settled? So -- the other thing you need and don't have--

ABRAHAM: Would you just not say it, Isaac?

ISAAC: --need, father, and conspicuously, father, do not have --

ABRAHAM: Isaac, a man's questions may take him straight to despair. It's your truth to come at, but you have to be more careful about coming at it the wrong way.

ISAAC: --Cannot by any stretch of the imagination, father, be said to have, is, the animal.

ABRAHAM: Oh, god.

ISAAC: Where's the animal? All right, it's not bright, but you could forget a flint. But when you come to sacrifice an animal, you don't forget the animal. Do you? Do you forget the animal when you come to sacrifice an animal?

Well, I'm not giving you time to answer; it could be you were planning to trap something up here.

ABRAHAM: Isaac!

ISAAC: I know, it might have been a bad day and in the end no offering; I'm sure you've worked all this out. And that just puzzles me the more.

ABRAHAM:

Isaac!

ISAAC: Probably, you know, it's staring me in the face...

ABRAHAM: If you were to look at my face at this moment...

ISAAC: Well, if you're not answering, or if that's all you're answering, thanks just the same, but I think that instead of looking at your face, I'll just look around.

ABRAHAM:

(pointing with both hands at his face)

No, here; here! I want you to see the harm your words are doing before you speak any more of them.

ISAAC: Yes, but I'll just look around.

(He begins to mime pushing aside shrubbery and searching.)

I'll make an effort to be informed. I'll just see what's been provided, if anything. With me, father, the living God has got to be very, very clear. You could say of me, "He likes to know everybody's mind" and the divine mind's a mind.

So, I'll just start my searching.

ABRAHAM:

(as ISAAC searches)

I have an answer for you; if you were to lift your

search from the grass to my face, I think you would see your answer there. But that's how it will have to be. I can't just out with it, and I can't say why not. Nothing about my answer is simple. Whatever you get from me is going to have pain and complexity in it. But you go on poking around there...

ISAAC: And I'm rewarded! If it isn't a ram!

(He mimes unhitching a leading string from a tree and leading the ram out onto the stage.)

It's got to be for us, hasn't it? When you find a ram hitched to a tree in the middle of an ice field, it's got to be for you, hasn't it? Will any man here make a doubt of that?

(raises his eyes to heaven)

Thank you, thank you, that was clear, the way I like you to be.

So I guess I've answered my question.

ABRAHAM: Well, you've found yourself a ram.

ISAAC: What I wonder -- and I suppose you won't have anything to say about this, either -- is why you didn't say a word. Or did you? Is this what you meant with your "Everything's here"? Couldn't you have been a little more proud and clear when such splendid attention was being paid? God admist us this way, why will you be so cagey?

(ISAAC reaches out his hand to stroke the ram, mimes feeling vacancy, turns in alarm in the direction of the ram, then rushes to the side of the stage and looks intently off.)

Bolted!

ABRAHAM:

(looking in a different direction from ISAAC's)

Here is the descent of the ram for the mind's eye:

Across slants of blue ice the ram slips and dashes, getting what support a ram can. And then? The ram attains the shelf of first leaves, and in his step is wilderness. And then? The ram plunges into a darkness of slim pines: it is making on'es way across a page which the pen has stroked and stroked. Now a great ravine throws itself in the ram's path: is there no declination? no, none; nothing for it, then, but to try the walls. Over goes the despairing ram, and though hurtling fast, the walls rush up faster. And then? What's next on the way down? It is a stream to plash about in and get breath. Now it's off again: Head down and horns out, the ram is running at the orange ball in the west. Evening finds the ram still running, on across fields of snow, well off the mountain, in silence, into darkness.

So much for the descent and loss of the ram for the mind's eye. Meanwhile something will have become clear.

(pause)

ISAAC: Don't speak it, I understand.

ABRAHAM: You've been looking long enough to understand

(He gets up off the ground.)

So: you have been handed on to the ice-field. Dust your robes, and welcome. Do you still "like it here"?

(long pause)

ISAAC:

(slowly)

You're terribly sure; but will I let you do it, do you think?

ABRAHAM: But what's this now, Isaac? I thought you said --

ISAAC: Yes, a lot of your thinking has that stamp. You must have so many things you need to get

taken for granted...

ABRAHAM: The ram danced in the eye of the mind and you said you understood.

ISAAC: What? That it's me for the sacrifice? That I get; there you've been abundantly clear. Now I have to be careful and clear, fighting for my life, giving my conditions...

ABRAHAM: What is all this, what's this about? The living God --

ISAAC: Just a minute and I'll get to the living God: could we keep things here on our own level for a moment? All right, now, putting everything most simply, Isaac is a muscular young man and Abraham's a greybeard. -- no, wait, I can be even simpler: I'm a power, you're a weakness. So I want it understood --

ABRAHAM: Nothing in my whole experience could have prepared me for this discussion!

ISAAC: I wonder if that's really quite true. Anyhow, I want it understood that if you don't come through with a reason for killing your son, if you don't, there's really nothing in the world to keep him from hustling you off the side of this mountain.

ABRAHAM: What are reasons here? Over and above that, is this my child speaking to me?

ISAAC: Now, wait: I can see how your thoughts are beginning to run. Either you're thinking "coward" or you're thinking "rebel"; but think neither. All I want to do is scatter some mistrust on the air. I need the spectres of violent disobedience here about me. I need them for a presence as we go about our understanding.

ABRAHAM: Oh, there's going to be an understanding? To understand what?

ISAAC: Before I say, have I made it clear --

ABRAHAM: Yes, you've made yourself clear; do I have to listen again to all your nasty little clarities? Would you just let us have this ghastliness you've been saving up?

ISAAC:

(smiling to himself)

You know, father, it would be a really amusing thing for me to...

ABRAHAM:

(nervous)

What, what's amusing here? What is this?

ISAAC: I hope I'm not going to have to say...

ABRAHAM:

(desperate)

Isaac!

ISAAC: Well, very likely, I'm not. So let's just put our minds to this understanding. That's going to take enough out of us.

ABRAHAM: I'm ready to be told what it is, Isaac.

ISAAC: Well, I'll tell you what it's not, and maybe that will be some relief to you. It's not a question of how much Abraham is loved by Isaac, but of the demands a man is within his rights to make. That's very important, what I just said; I mean, it isn't as if there's someone in the world to whom I could say, "I'll do it for you, I'll do it for no one else," and you happen not to be that someone. Now, do you understand? If so, I'm ready with my condition, which will also be very important to you, because that's the condition you get me on.

ABRAHAM: I'm ready for you, Isaac.

ISAAC: I doubt that, father, but here it is: I have to be convinced you do not do your own will here.

ABRAHAM: Why don't you ask what you really want to ask?

ISAAC: I'm asking you, father, what I really want to ask you.

ABRAHAM: Which is only another way of saying --

ISAAC: Never mind what else it is! Mind what you've been asked, and mind what you've been threatened with, and then see if you can't see your way to something honest. Do you do your own will here?

ABRAHAM: You have to see, this is a very hard thing....

ISAAC: No, I'm afraid I don't see that. If you know your own mind --

ABRAHAM: Oh, Isaac, when have I ever made a claim to know my own mind? Can you ever recall --

ISAAC: All right, but you have now got to make such a claim!

(flaring up)

I'm blue in the face hearing you take this, that position! What I want, I want to hear the positions laid claim to. Do you do your own will here?

ABRAHAM: You're putting such accustion into that!

ISAAC: So what? Do you do your own will here?

ABRAHAM: You're making it harder and harder...

ISAAC: Do you do --

ABRAHAM:

(on a desperate impulse)

All right, yes, then, yes every way: my will, my schemes, my passionate ends in view. What are you, anyway? A boy. A boy filling up my life, growing into the youth I've lost. Fathers of families follow you into the hunt; a woman finds your image in her mind; leaders in Israel begin to give you respect. Now these are my rights, you boy -- mine, the Patriarch's! Who heard me say a word about a diminution; and yet, I grow less, grow less, -- what's to do? I want to have to kill this boy: give me reason and a means! But you don't even give me that. I've got my father-rights, yes, but in the case of a perfect son...? The snare will have to be the perfection, and some of the fiddling is going to have to involve the living God. The poor living God is going to have to be represented as saying: "I want him for mine; you bring him over here"; and to the father saying: "If you want to show you're worthy to keep him, you're going to have to kiss him goodbye. I'm sorry, but that's the way I operate, I'm such a joker." What I was going to put upon great God! And you, with all your nobility, would you have stood a chance, or even seen what was happening? Yes, I do my own will here. Throw me off the mountain, if you want. Come on, you power; here's your weakness.

(pause)

ISAAC: It's such an obvious lie.

ABRAHAM: The answer to such a question is going to be a lie. "Do I do my own will here"! Son, there was no point where Heaven's will took up and your father's left off.

ISAAC: That could be the most arrogant thing a human being has said yet.

ABRAHAM: Well, it could be and it isn't. Would you just trust me, Isaac?

ISAAC: Look, you're going to kill me, do you ask for trust on the basis of that?

ABRAHAM: Oh, I'll do some explaining --

ISAAC: Thank s Abraham, but I've a sickening hunch what you might consider an explanation worth dying for. So I'll just see what the living God has to say and then we'll see.

ABRAHAM: You think you're going to get the hand reaching down fire each tome?

ISAAC: Watch it! Watch it, father! You're asking for the thing you can't bear.

ABRAHAM: Well, you may get you're lightening, but I will not be the one to single out the living God for you. Understand right off, Isaac, that is the one thing I will not do. I will not stand aside and refer you to God. I had that lie ready because I saw you coming.

ISAAC: "Coming..."?

ABRAHAM: Coming after the living God.

ISAAC: Well, all right, then, coming after the living God. Who are you to throw yourself in the path? Stop mincing around there, get out from between us. How much jumping do you think it takes to fill the field of my vision? Whatever you think, it's an understatement, not that I'm so capricious, but I'm watching divine light and it's an eyeful already, believe me. There may be some jerkety little shadow tripping around in there, but so what? Who do you think's paying any attention?

ABRAHAM: Is that the impression I give?

ISAAC: You want to know precisel y the impression you give? A very small man studying how to veil a very sizable ghastliness. I'm telling you what I get: some monstrousness drifting out of the divine will, and you taking the most elaborate pains to keep me from noticing -- maybe to keep your own self from noticing.

ABRAHAM: I put nothing upon God!

ISAAC: Do you not? When you say, "Please don't jump to conclusions," when you say, "Please make an effort to understand" -- Well, the nerve of you!

As if you understood a grain better than I what the divine justice is about here! And not understanding, really, really not understanding at all that the dear Lord should be so suddenly dreadful, what do you do, -- cry out against the light for more light? Better so-- much! But you have fought down your consciousness of a rotten place in the divine mind. The way the situation presents itself to you is, you're going to have to do some fast covering. In the spareness of your faith, you have the nerve to be respon sible. But who needs you to be responsible?

ABRAHAM: You want to fix a tricky irreverance upon me, Isaac, but I have not sinned that way.

ISAAC: You can make yourself sound sure...

ABRAHAM: Perfectly, Isaac; perfectly sure. To have sinned that way, I would have to be capable of athing I'm not. I have wandered over the ice-field of the divine mind too long to try and abstract the divine will from my own. I have not the apparatus to take such a quintessence.

ISAAC: Answer this clearly: Have you any confidence in the justice of what you're being asked for?

ABRAHAM: I don't need to answer that because here I am with a knife in my hand; but I have confidence in the admixture of divine will in whatever my convictions are.

ISAAC: So much for trying to get something straight out of you.

ABRAHAM: Oh, Isaac, you were answered as di-

rectly as I have ever seen a man answered!

ISAAC: You claim to have done that for me?

ABRAHAM: I, Isaac? The ram! As he hurls himself from your arms into the waste, the ram is the very directness of the answer.

ISAAC: You can turn that a hundred ways, but you're not about to acknowledge one more thing than the consenting soul acknowledges. If most of my attention weren't taken up wondering how a knife wound feels, I could admire that.

ABRAHAM: Isaac, what's wrong with you that you won't believe the least evil of me, but you're ready to put upon God the worst monstrosities? Now I want to give you your due: you see sanctity, you see monstrosity, but why won't you put each where it's more likely to go?

ISAAC: You -- are you honestly as ready as you say to do that? Let's get the living God out here in the open.

ABRAHAM: Well, now, Isaac --

ISAAC: No, let's get him out. I want to run over this, not your way, not mine, but His own way, with His own justice.

ABRAHAM: Maybe that can be done, Isaac, but not by me. Because I see a question and I don't see any answer forthcoming: "What do you want with your knowledge?" I defy you to be at all specific. There is such a thing as knowledge which, if a man has no need for, he has no right to.

ISAAC: It's going to help me with my death -- that's not use enough?

ABRAHAM: Deaths glimmering with meaning are fine things, but no sacrifice. If you want to make a sacrifice, it will have to be your unsatisfactions, that precisely. If you're thinking it over as the knife falls, that's most acceptable. You've been patient about coming out and asking how I can set a creature's feelings above a father's. Well, it's because...

(pause)

ISAAC: Slip your mind, father?

ABRAHAM:

(with a strange, low intensity)

It's because, I'm so busy puzzling away...

ISAAC: Yes, well, it's going to take some puzzling to find the God of Abraham a way out.

ABRAHAM: Once and for all, stop it, stop trying to tear apart this graft of my will upon the divine! It begins to take, and the organism to have life. You may say, unnatural life, unsteady life, if that's what you want to call it. You may say for that matter, Isaac, what you please.

(pause)

ISAAC:

(wearily)

Have you got anything at all for me?

ABRAHAM: I can tell you a circumstance while I sharpen the knife.

ISAAC: I think I'll take that, and it's not much considering what else I'm to take from you, I'm to take my death from you.

ABRAHAM:

(Takes out his knife, tests its edge, uses it to gesture with during the subsequent speeches)

What I'm going to tell you is a dream of my sleep. I'm not going to come out and say, "The dream weighs for so much," no, but I'll say this: this morning is the morning after that dream.

A fury of water streamed over the dreaming mind. Where's it all going to? and Where's the fire? were questions by which a dreamer might struggle on to some dry place in the consciousness. Shadows, for an answer, formed themselves around light places, the mind shook the image clear, and I could make out it was these mountains going under: great peaks, mind you, submitting to drowning as if their attention lay elsewhere. The range was becoming a series of profound ocean ridges, the trees became underwater plants, the animals became fishes.

ISAAC: What has this got to do with anything?

ABRAHAM: Wait, Isaac; you have to be more patient than that. All right: now by degrees the waters cool off and calm themselves. They can afford to be glassy now, they've got themselves everything, they've submerged a whole mountain world to their will. Or nearly. Because this ice-field of ours has not gone below; no, this one shelf of ice, sticking out of miles of untroubled water, prevails.

ISAAC: Well, that's like nothing I ever heard.

ABRAHAM: Now I think you'll be particularly interested to know that this ice plays host to a live thing. A furry animal with a wound streaming from its back, an animal who would not consent to fishhood and now hasn't many other prospects, darts all over the ice, frantic for a way off.

ISAAC: Suppose you put a meaning on that.

ABRAHAM: I'm not ready -- you mean, on the darting?

ISAAC: Yes.

ABRAHAM: Yes, that's what I thought you meant -- I'm not ready. But here's a strange thing, now get this: -- I did mention I was dreaming, didn't I? well, I mention it now -- but get this: Swirls of fire wind out from the sun. It becomes a raging fireball, and other suns rise in the southern and western skies, fireballs too. All these suns, suns perhaps to the number of ten, travel across heaven to a point in the sky square above the ice-field. It's getting smaller before your eyes, each moment a little less ice above the water. A moment comes when even the animal, amid his exhaustive dartings, takes a long look up and gets the idea: his place and world is being melted out from under him! He flings himself about the lessening ice faster than the eye has any wish to see, and then suddenly, stops dead, stares wildly at the overhead conspiracy of suns, at the sea washing over less and less ice, and then -- flings himself upon the water and swims for the horizon.

ISAAC: That was the thing to do.

ABRAHAM: Wasn't it though! I have never seen, sleeping or waking, such a sense of the moment.

ISAAC: So if you had to put into words what you get from this --

ABRAHAM: Well, of course, I mulled and mulled, but listen, here's an interesting part. The fireballs go on with their consuming until there's nothing to see except the twisted little waves that come from something just under the surface. And that much accomplished, the fireballs disband, God knows where they go -- in the blink of an eye they're not there. The true sun's back where he was and not saying a word. At a vast distance, I still make out the wounded animal swimming for the horizon,

while thousands of feet below, mountain forests sway under water, and rabbits and birds practise with their new fins.

(pause)

Maybe you're waiting for me to add, there were words coming in under the visual sensations.

ISAAC: That's what I was waiting for. What did you make the words out to be?

ABRAHAM: I should say, under the circumstances, what could those words have been but the speaking of God?

(pause)

ISAAC:

(after waiting a moment in vain for him to continue)

I have a right to what was said, whatever was said.

ABRAHAM: Did I mention the clear chords of music? The willow leaves? The smell of fresh bread?

ISAAC: What's all that?

ABRAHAM: Well, further details.

ISAAC: You don't have to give me every touch. What you do owe me is, the words. You have to get God's words across to me as clearly as you can.

ABRAHAM: Now wait! I say, "God spoke," but I'm only telling you how it felt to me. As I say, I had the impression of divine speech, but that doesn't mean God spoke, I'm only giving my impression.

ISAAC: "God spoke" is "God spoke." "God spoke is clear enough.

ABRAHAM: That's really not necessarily so. Did I mention the waterfall of flowers?

ISAAC: The what?

ABRAHAM: A waterfall, as you might call it, a waterfall of blue flowers sweeping down swifter and swifter before the whole scene. Some yellow flowers, too, actually...

ISAAC: Look, you go on giving me piece after piece of your vision, and don't you see I haven't a use in the world for them? I have to have God's words from you and that's all I have to have. God said, and you must say.

ABRAHAM:

(steadily)

I was having one of my dreams, the way I do, when God spoke through the confusion of my dream. God spoke through at me, exceptionally clear words, I thought, though at the moment I have no sense of the words apart from the confusion.

(difficult pause)

The gist was, to bring my boy under the knife.

ISAAC: With that understanding, I lay down my head.

(ISAAC kneels and bows his head. ABRAHAM, by pushing down on his back, forces him, half-resisting, to a prone position. ABRAHAM lifts his knife and at the same moment lifts his robe as a shield between ISAAC and the audience. He plunges the knife into ISAAC's back; ISAAC does not move or cry out. ABRAHAM pulls out the knife and throws it from him as if it burned his hand. He lowers the robe.)

He goes across the stage and takes up some sticks which have fallen out of the sacks onto the ground.)

ABRAHAM :

(surprised)

Soaked through!

(He kicks at the ice, tentatively at first, then violently, repeating with each violent kick the word:) Melting!

(He kicks so hard he loses his balance and falls across ISAAC's body; rests there a moment, panting.)

Melting. There's a turn.

(He begins to get up, happens to catch sight of ISAAC's head, and starts back horrified. He approaches the body again, lifts the head off the ground and fingers it in different places. He lets it drop back and turns out.)

Where the blade took my son, here is a ram's head, bleeding.

That's it. I don't have a word to say after that.

SLOW CURTAIN